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New Academic Center To Focus On Manufacturing Excellence

JACKSON, Miss. – A new partnership at the University of Mississippi aims to keep jobs at home by educating the nation's future manufacturing professionals.

The university, the state of Mississippi and Toyota Motor Corporation are joining together to create the Center for Manufacturing Excellence, the first of its kind in the country. The center will offer students not only degrees in engineering with an emphasis on manufacturing, but also strong cross-disciplinary studies that reflect the other skills needed in engineering and the sciences, such as business, management and accounting, and leadership and human resources.

The \$30 million center is being funded through a portion of the state incentive package that helped attract Toyota to Blue Springs, where the company is building a \$1.3 billion automotive manufacturing plant. When production begins in 2010 the plant is expected to employ about 2,000 workers who will build the popular Highlander sport utility vehicle.

“This center will be a perfect blend of the academic and real-world focus so essential today for success in the multi-faceted global manufacturing sector. Under terms

of the enabling legislation the center will work closely with the state's manufacturing companies to improve their competitiveness in all areas of manufacturing," Governor Haley Barbour said at a news conference announcing the center.

"My expectation is that students who complete this intensive program will become industry leaders in every phase of many different businesses," Governor Barbour said.

((CHANCELLOR QUOTE GOES HERE)))

((TOYOTA QUOTES GOES HERE)))

"The Center for Manufacturing Excellence will be a genuinely unique institution that generates engineering graduates who understand advanced manufacturing from a process/engineering perspective and from the business, management and leadership points of view," said James Vaughan, Frederick A. P. Barnard Distinguished Professor of Mechanical Engineering and associate dean of the School of Engineering.

The CME is thought to be the only one of its kind, said Dennis Cuneo, a former Toyota senior vice president and current Toyota consultant who led the team that selected the Blue Springs site.

"It will help enhance and further manufacturing excellence in Mississippi and beyond," Cuneo said. "Automotive and non-automotive companies will benefit from the center. I salute Governor Barbour and Chancellor Khayat for taking such a positive step to help manufacturing thrive."

“We are happy to see the state so committed to advancing manufacturing,” Cuneo said. “Some people assume that the manufacturing sector is in decline and is destined to move offshore. The creation of the center shows that the manufacturing sector is vibrant and growing in Mississippi and will play an important role in the state’s economy.”

A major goal of the center is to produce and connect a continuous pool of highly-qualified graduates likely to be hired by manufacturers as engineers, accountants, business managers and other professionals.

One floor of the planned 47,000-square-foot center is to house a small factory floor complete with different process lines, Vaughan said. In addition to classrooms, laboratories and student workspaces, the building also is to have office space for the center’s six new faculty members, as well as room for visiting faculty and the visiting Toyota executive-in-residence.

As a component of the center, the university is developing an emphasis program of instruction in manufacturing, slanted toward lean manufacturing applicable to all Mississippi manufacturing industries. The School of Engineering plans to offer a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering with an emphasis in manufacturing.

The new CME programs will provide opportunities for students to be immersed in strong cross-disciplinary studies that reflect the skills needed in engineering and the sciences, business, management, accounting, leadership and human resources. The School of Business Administration and the School of Accountancy plan to offer a minor in engineering, through the School of Engineering, to provide students with fundamental lean manufacturing and production techniques.

In addition to expanded academic opportunities, the CME students are to participate in an internship or co-op work study program to gain hands-on industrial experience.

“By the beginning of their junior year, our students will be heavily involved in responding to real manufacturing design problems,” Vaughan said. “By the end of their senior year, they should have mastered all of the skills which would make them attractive to industry both inside and outside of Mississippi.”

Though definite plans have not been finalized, the program could begin enrolling students as early as the fall of 2009, Vaughan said. Current students and students who enroll this fall also will benefit from the CME.

Other goals of the center are to serve as a resource center for research and programs related to manufacturing, to train the state’s manufacturing community and to collaborate with local K-12 schools and local community colleges.

“At the University of Mississippi, we understand that for our students to succeed in the ultra-competitive global economy, we must be deliberate about developing and aligning resources,” UM Interim Provost Morris Stocks said. “The Center for Manufacturing Excellence is a wonderful example of coordinating the resources of the university, the state and the manufacturing industry in order to brighten the economic and academic future of our extended community.”

For more information on the Center for Manufacturing Excellence, visit <http://www.olemiss.edu>.